

New reports analyse impacts of plantation industry on rural communities in Tasmania

Two new reports released today by the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry provide the Tasmanian community with a better understanding of how the expansion of the plantation industry in recent years has changed rural communities.

The reports, *Community attitudes to plantations: survey of the views of residents of Tasmania* by Dr Kathryn Williams of the University of Melbourne, and *Socioeconomic impacts of the plantation industry on rural communities in Tasmania* by Dr Jacki Schirmer of the Australian National University, provide a detailed understanding of how people living in rural communities view the rapid expansion of plantations, and of the socioeconomic changes that have accompanied this plantation expansion in recent years. (The reports are available for download from the CRC for Forestry website at www.crcforestry.com.au. See the links on the home page under 'latest news', 'recent releases' or 'quick links'.)

Dr Williams and Dr Schirmer will present their findings at public seminars in Hobart (Monday 20th July, 5.30pm), Launceston (Tuesday 21st July, 5.30pm), Burnie (Wednesday 22nd July, 5.30pm) and Scottsdale (Thursday 23rd July, 5.30pm).

Dr Kathryn Williams says that understanding community views on plantations can inform land use policy and communication: 'Our research makes it clear that, for many residents, plantations are not "just another crop". Understanding how different people view plantations can help improve communication among plantation companies, government and residents.'

Key findings of her survey of residents' views on plantations include that:

- Plantations were often viewed less positively than traditional rural land uses such as cropping and grazing, and new 'green' land uses such as wind farms and revegetation.
- There are differing views on the acceptability of plantations in Tasmania. While 43% of participants indicated eucalypt plantations grown for pulp were acceptable at some level, 45% indicated they were unacceptable.
- Some plantations are considered more acceptable than others, for example when grown for timber rather than pulp and paper, when grown on poorer soils or when grown on land previously used for plantations rather than on agricultural land.
- Beliefs about the benefits of plantations for rural communities and the environment are strikingly diverse, and appear to strongly influence respondents' level of support for plantations.

Dr Jacki Schirmer, meanwhile, has been analysing the social and economic changes that accompany plantation expansion: 'The changes that result from plantation expansion are positive for some people and negative for others – the impacts depend on a range of factors'. Key findings of her work include that:

- Eucalypt (hardwood) plantations currently generate 0.33 jobs per 100 hectares, and softwood plantations 1.80 jobs per 100 hectares. Once a higher proportion of eucalypt plantations reach harvest age, it is estimated eucalypt plantations will generate up to 0.65 jobs per 100 hectares.
- Plantations generate fewer jobs before the 'farm gate' than most traditional agricultural land uses, but when downstream processing is included in the analysis plantations generate more jobs than sheep grazing, beef grazing and cropping, and less jobs than intensive agricultural land uses such as dairy farming.
- A shift in land use from traditional agriculture to plantations is accompanied by some shift in employment opportunities, with a higher proportion of jobs in the plantation industry located in large towns compared to traditional agricultural industries.
- The expansion of plantations has led to a high turnover in rural populations in some areas, but has resulted in only a small net loss of rural population, with most housing on plantation properties occupied by new residents.

Recent changes to the plantation industry will be discussed in forthcoming seminars, with this recent research informing the discussion.

Public seminars 20th to 23rd July

Dr Williams and Dr Schirmer will present their findings in:

Hobart on Monday 20th July 2009, 5.30-7.00pm at the Centenary Lecture Theatre, University of Tasmania (Grosvenor Cres)

Launceston on Tuesday 21st July 2009, 5.30-7.00pm at Lecture Theatre 9, University of Tasmania (Newnham Dve)

Burnie on Wednesday 22nd July 2009, 5.30-7.00pm at Room D202, University of Tasmania (16 Mooreville Rd)

Scottsdale on Thursday 23rd July, 5.30-7.00pm at the Scottsdale Hotel, 18-24 George St.

All members of the public are invited. Dr Williams and Dr Schirmer will be available to speak with the media following the seminars.

Contacts:

Dr Kathryn Williams
CRC for Forestry &
University of Melbourne
Phone 0407 814 544
Email kjhw@unimelb.edu.au

Dr Jacki Schirmer
CRC for Forestry &
Australian National University
Phone 0428 254 948
Email jacki.schirmer@anu.edu.au